

SEATTLE FIRE DEPARTMENT
Information Bulletin #967



Evacuation Procedures for Places of Worship

This bulletin was developed to assist leaders of churches and other places of worship in preparing their members to safely evacuate in a fire emergency. The back side contains a checklist that you can copy and distribute to members to help protect your place of worship from the threat of arson.

The recent arson fires in churches across the country have focused the efforts and concerns of many towards protecting places of worship. To protect your congregation from arson, or a fire of another cause, please plan and practice an evacuation plan at the earliest possible date. You may want to look to those in your membership with fire service experience to assist you, or contact the Seattle Fire Department as directed below.

To Develop and Practice a Plan

1. Make a floor plan for each level of your church or place of worship. Mark the exit doors to the outside as well as any fire alarm pull stations and fire extinguishers. Post the floor plan throughout the building, marking "you are here" at the appropriate location. Use arrows to show the two nearest exit routes.

2. At services, take a few minutes to talk about what everyone should do in order to quickly evacuate the building. Announce that at the end of services, you will practice the evacuation plan.

3. Point out all the exits. Divide the congregation into the appropriate number of sections to utilize all the exits. You may want to pass out a map of the building, showing the exit routes for the various sections. Advise

members as to an outside meeting place, away from the building entrance.

4. Direct ushers, or other membership leaders, to serve as floor wardens to help direct evacuation. These floor wardens should assist those unable to use exit stairs, and those who may have difficulty walking without assistance. It is advisable to meet with those who will serve as floor wardens to explain their role prior to conducting the evacuation drill.

5. Explain that if the fire alarm activates, or if you smell smoke or suspect something is wrong, you will announce that everyone should calmly evacuate the building using the nearest exit. Once outside, use the nearest telephone to dial 911 and report the problem.

Please remind your membership that their greatest chance of experiencing a fire is in their own home. Ask members to test their smoke detectors today, and to make and practice a home fire escape plan.

You may want to appoint a committee to work on fire safety issues for your congregation on a regular basis. Our Public Education Office, as well as your local fire station, can assist you. If you have questions, or would like the location of your nearest fire station, call 386-1338 weekdays during regular office hours.

The backside of this bulletin contains a checklist to help you keep your facility safe.

Inspection Checklist for Places of Worship

Keeping your place of worship safe from unwanted or ill-meaning intruders is the first step to safety. The following checklist can help.

SECURITY

- ☐ Secure all doors and windows. Be sure that locks do not prevent escape in the event of a fire. Keep all unlocked entrances monitored.
- ☐ Install and maintain night lighting. Consider motion detector lighting.
- ☐ Leave some lighting on inside the building during hours of darkness.
- ☐ If your place of worship has a security and/or fire alarm, be sure it is tested and is working properly.
- ☐ If your place of worship has a 24 hour sanctuary, monitor access to the remainder of the building.
- ☐ Any night watch should be done from outside the building. Do not allow people to sleep inside the building.
- ☐ Keep or trim landscaping away from doors and windows. This will help get rid of hiding places.

HAZARDS

- ☐ Get rid of fuel sources that can allow a fire to start. Properly dispose of piles of wood, paper or trash.
- ☐ Keep outside materials stored at least five (5) feet from the building. This includes dumpsters.
- ☐ Place locks on dumpsters, and do not allow them to become overfilled. If necessary, arrange for additional pickup.
- ☐ Store flammable liquids in secured and approved places.
- ☐ Exits should be clear and accessible at all times.
- ☐ Keep landscaping green. It is less likely to maintain a fire if it is green and healthy.

INVOLVE COMMUNITY MEMBERS

- ☐ Ask members to drive by the place of worship when possible.
 - ☐ Keep members up to date on scheduled activities and authorized groups using the place of worship and its grounds.
 - ☐ Ask neighbors to watch the building. Encourage them to report suspicious activity.
 - ☐ Participate in your Neighborhood Crime Watch program. Call the Seattle Police Department Crime Prevention Unit at 684-7555 for information.
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